

Leo Strauss

The Lysistrate



This is the only play whose title designates a human individual. It is the only play whose title designates the chief character or the human being responsible for the design that is executed in the play. The title comes closest to that of the *Peace* (Eirene); the end pursued in both plays is public peace. Yet while the goddess Eirene is hardly distinguishable from a statue, Lysistrate is a human woman; the *Lysistrate* is altogether a human drama.

The complaining with which the play opens is done by the heroine. Lysistrate is annoyed because she has to wait for the other women whom she has called together. But she does not have to wait as long as Dikaionpolis or Strepsiades; Kalonike arrives almost at once. The *Lysistrate* is the only play that begins with a very brief soliloquy. Kalonike's arrival does not visibly improve Lysistrate's mood. For apart from the fact that she still has to wait for the other women, she can now vent her annoyance on her gentle friend: The women who keep her waiting confirm the bad opinion men have of women; instead of coming to a deliberation about a matter of some importance, they prefer to stay at home in bed. Kalonike admits that the bad reputation of women is deserved, yet defends the members of her sex against Lysistrate's particular complaints: It is not easy for women to leave home, for they have to take care of their husbands, their servants, and, above all, their babies. One wonders whether Lysistrate has children. She surely feels that at the moment caring for babies is not the most urgent thing; those women would not have hesitated to neglect their babies in order to have intercourse with men. Granted that a woman's place is in the home, the home is now threatened by the city; the women must now take care of the city in the first place. Lysistrate had not told the other women what business she plans to submit to their deliberation. Nor does she tell it now to Kalonike. She merely tells her that the salvation of the

whole of Greece now depends on the women; therefore she has called together not only the women of Athens but those of Sparta and Boiotia as well: The notorious levity of women is the only hope for Greece, for only by means of that levity can one hope to put an end to the present war.

Myrrhine and the other Athenian women arrive; Lysistrata's reception of them is not too friendly. Very different is her reception of the Spartan Lampito, who arrives as the leader of the women from the enemy camp. The Athenian women are impressed by the beauty of Lampito and other women from the enemy cities—by the beauty of their bodies rather than of their souls, and of parts other than the heads rather than of the heads; they view beauty in the perspective of the Aristophanean comedy, from below. Urged by the others, Lysistrata begins to disclose her design by asking them whether they do not long for the fathers of their children, for she knows that the husbands of all of them are away on military service; she says nothing about her own husband. She appeals to them primarily as mothers. They reply that their husbands are away on military service for many months or at home only for very short periods. She thereupon asks them whether they would not be willing to join her in putting an end to the war if she found a way for achieving this result. They heartily reply in the affirmative. The primary motive prompting the women seems to be maternal care. Yet Lysistrata deems it necessary to mention the fact that not only their husbands but also other sources of sexual satisfaction are unavailable to them as a consequence of the war; here she speaks of "we women"; she appeals to their sexual desire at least as much as to their maternal care. This then is Lysistrata's simple design: If the women desire to enjoy their husbands' love, they must force them to make peace, and the only way in which they can exert that compulsion consists in refusing to have sexual intercourse with them; only by forgoing the present enjoyment of a good can they enjoy the same good securely and always in the future. This design is to begin with entirely unacceptable to the women: Every other evil is preferable to sexual abstention. They speak no longer of their maternal concern. Accordingly, Lysistrata does not even attempt to remind them of that concern. She has only one resource left: example. The only woman who did not openly reject her proposal was Lampito; when Lysistrata addresses her alone, Lampito with some hesitation agrees to the proposal. Thereupon Kalonike, speaking for the other women, is prepared to reconsider her refusal, provided Lysistrata can show that the abstention demanded of them will in fact lead to

peace. Lysistrata performs this task with ease: The husbands will make peace when they see that making peace is the necessary and sufficient condition for satisfying their sexual desire; each woman must arouse her husband's desire to its highest pitch while herself remaining immune to desire. Kalonike no longer replies that what is required of the women might be beyond their power. She replies that the husbands might turn their backs on their wives, i.e., that the husbands might find other ways of satisfying their desire; yet she is forced by Lysistrata to admit that the alternatives are less attractive to the husbands. Still, there remains an obvious difficulty: There is no reason to assume that women have greater self-control than men or that women are in this respect superior to men and hence have power over them. In Sparta the women have greater power than the men but, Lampito wonders, is the same true of Athens? The Athenian men can wage war, regardless of what the Athenian women do, because of the navy and the war treasure. Lysistrata reassures her by telling her that the old women of Athens have been ordered to seize the akropolis, where the treasure is kept, while the young women deliberate; she implies that the navy will be of no use without the treasure. After all objections to her design have been disposed of, Lysistrata persuades the women to confirm their agreement at once by a solemn oath. According to Lysistrata's suggestion they would have sworn by Ares,⁶⁸ for while their goal is peace, they must wage war against the enemies of peace, i.e., the men: The way to peace is war. Still, a warlike oath is felt to be inappropriate in the situation; accordingly the liquid that the women use for the solemnity is not blood, but unmixed wine: The commitment to extreme continence is made firm by an act of incontinence. Lysistrata calls on the Lady Persuasion; she or another woman swears by Aphrodite. The solemn vow formulated by Lysistrata opens with the women's promise to refuse themselves to all men, not only to their husbands, but to their lovers as well; for it is obvious that if the men can have recourse to women who are not their wives, they can not be starved into submission. In the sequel however the vow speaks only of the husbands: Lovers are a marginal case, which can be disregarded.

In the *Lysistrata* the design antedates the play (26–27) as in the *Wasps* and the *Peace*; but the former design, as distinguished from the designs animating these two other plays, requires for its execution the co-operation of free people as distinguished from slaves. Hence the private deliberation that led to the design must be followed up by a common deliberation (14) that leads to the common adoption of the same design; while the

original deliberation precedes the play, the play begins with a repetition of that deliberation. As a consequence, there is no need for anyone to address the audience about the reasons of the design, and hence in particular there is no room for anyone to act as a spokesman for the poet. For the same reason there is no room in the *Lysistrata* for an opening soliloquy like those opening the *Acharnians* and the *Clouds*. Generally stated, in the *Lysistrata*, as distinguished from the plays hitherto discussed, there is no room for a Euripidean prologue. We have no way of knowing whether Lysistrata's private reasons are identical with her publicly stated reason.

According to Lysistrata's design, the women will excite the men's sexual desire to the highest degree and then frustrate it. As a consequence, the *Lysistrata* is Aristophanes' most indecent play. Yet the end that is therein pursued by these indecent means is most decent, most just. Besides, it is understood that the proceedings will take place between lawfully wedded people. While the *Lysistrata* may shock decency by the public exhibition of strictly private things, it does not shock justice or piety. It may suffice here to remind readers of the designs of the heroes of the two other plays devoted to peace, the *Acharnians* and the *Peace*. The *Lysistrata* is at the same time the most indecent and the most moral (most harmless or least revolutionary) of Aristophanes' plays. Perhaps this fact accounts for its singular popularity.

Before the solemn oath-taking is properly completed, i.e., before the large majority of the women have been able to partake of the wine, their attention is distracted by the clamor of the old women who have seized the akropolis. Lysistrata sends Lampito away to Sparta there to take care of their common affairs, while she keeps the other women from the enemy cities in Athens as hostages. The Athenian young women, led by Lysistrata, will join the old ones in securing the treasure against the expected counterattack by the Athenian men, i.e., the old men, for the men in their prime are away from Athens. The chorus of old men enters. They hasten to the akropolis to take it away from the women. They are prepared for a regular battle; they view the seizure of the akropolis by the women as if it were the action of a foreign enemy. Precisely the old men who seem to be beyond the reach of Lysistrata's weapon appear to endanger her whole enterprise. They are prepared if need be to burn the women to death. They particularly hate one woman, the wife of Lykon (270). It is not clear whether that woman is the leader of the old women or of the whole women's conspiracy (i.e., Lysistrata), or whether she is hated on different grounds; yet the mere fact that this is a question shows how little we

know of Lysistrata, of her husband or children, her way of life, her position in society, and so on: While the whole action of the play, which is instigated by Lysistrata, turns on the relations of husbands and wives, we hear nothing definite about Lysistrata's own husband. Is her husband by any chance old and impotent, and is she driven to her extraordinary action by the absence on military service of her lover or lovers, whom she can not get back except by the return of peace, and is not the only way in which she can bring back peace to induce all other women in their prime to refuse themselves to their husbands in their prime? In that case the act of supreme continence demanded of the women would be less of a sacrifice for Lysistrata than for any other woman. The only other leading character in the comedies about whom we know as little as we do about Lysistrata is Peisthetairos. Lysistrata would deserve to be called Peisthetaira. Is Lysistrata meant to be the female counterpart of Peisthetairos? While Peisthetairos starves the gods into submission, Lysistrata starves the men into submission. Is she the superwoman as Peisthetairos is the superman? While Peisthetairos becomes the successor of Zeus, Lysistrata does not even dream of acting against the gods. While Lysistrata tries to follow Aeschylus, her male opponents (differing profoundly from their contemporary Strepsiades) take the side of Euripides (188-89, 283, 368).

The chorus of women enters. They have supplied themselves with water in order to fight the fire brought by the old men, or, more precisely, in order to extinguish the fire with which the old men threaten to smoke out or to burn the old women who have occupied the sacred building. While the men had called the women "hated by Euripides and by the gods" and had come to the help of Athena, the women call on Athena to help them and call the men impious; in contradistinction to the men, they call only on Athena. When the two choruses become aware of each other, they hurl threats, insults, and provocations at each other. But the women and their water prove to be superior to the men and their fire; the men are defeated by being drenched. At this point, a proboulos (a high magistrate) appears with a police detachment. He had come to take money for the navy out of the treasure, but was refused entrance by the women within; he is therefore as indignant as the drenched old men. He sees in what happens another sign of that female license which shows itself especially in the strange cults favored by women; in his view the men are ultimately responsible for the women's license, since they unwittingly encourage their wives' adultery. The present situation reminds him of what happened at the time when the Athenians made the disastrous decision to

undertake the Sicilian expedition; at that time a woman's lamenting of Adonis was a bad omen for the expedition.⁶⁹ This fact seems to prove that the Athenians would have been wise to listen to the woman's voice. But since this would justify the women's present action, the dignitary tries to make the women's license responsible for the Sicilian disaster in order to exculpate his sex. He thus reveals from the beginning the weakness of the position of the Athenian men as against that of the Athenian women and therewith unwittingly prophesies the women's victory. Be this as it may, he orders the archers under his command to open the gates by force.

Before they can obey him Lysistrata comes out: It is neither necessary nor wise to use force if one has to do with a sensible human being like Lysistrata; sense, persuasion, and mind should be used. She hopes to win without fighting. The dignitary disagrees with her view that what is needed is sense and not force; he commands that she be arrested. Lysistrata is forced to threaten that she will use force against force. The archer recoils. When the dignitary commands two archers to fetter her, other women come to her help; the archers recoil before the threats of the women, who swear by female gods. The dignitary prepares an attack in form. Lysistrata warns him that a large force of fighting women who are heavily armed is standing by indoors. When he does not relent, she calls out her fellow fighters, who rout the archers with ease. Since the women desire peace they must prepare for war and even wage war; they must become wasps; it is their good fortune that the men with whom they have to do battle are only decrepit citizens and barbarian slaves. The women claim to have acted only on the defensive; after all, they only defended their conquest. The defeat of the dignitary and his detachment restores the self-respect of the previously defeated old men, who have much less dignity to lose. They delicately describe the dignitary's defeat as a mistaken attempt to argue with brutes. Accordingly they advise him to join them in trying to find out from the women why they have seized the akropolis: His dignity will be preserved if he pretends to act as prosecutor. He is shrewd enough to act on this advice. He learns from Lysistrata—sense and composure incarnate—that the women have seized the akropolis in order to lay their hands on the money so that it will no longer be used for the war; the women who administer the things belonging to the household well enough for the men will henceforth administer the public treasure too. The public treasure is to be used for the war, without which Athens can not be saved? The women, not war, will save Athens. War and peace are not the business of women? Look at the mess that men have

made of the war. At first the women, with their usual modesty, said nothing, although they were quite aware of the blunders that the men committed. Then, suffering in their hearts, they laughingly asked their husbands about the decisions of the *demos*; Lysistrata's husband told her that this was none of her business and that she should keep silent; fearing or respecting her husband more than other wives did theirs, she kept silent. But male imbecility increased as the war went on. The women could not help becoming outspoken in their dissatisfaction; their husbands' sole reply was to threaten to silence them by force and to quote Homer, or Hektor, against them: "Let war be the business of the men." Yet the men themselves have come to admit that there is not a single man in the country. When the women heard this, they assembled at once and decided that they must save Greece: Now the time has come for the men to listen and to be silent. The sex that is capable of acting, i.e., acting quickly, claims rule over the sex that has proved to be incapable of acting. This claim—this reversal of the order of nature, as the old fashioned might say—is of course altogether unbearable to the dignitary. He does not give in even when confronted with the fact that "let war be the business of the women" is in Greek metrically as perfect as Homer's "let war be the business of the men." While the metrical equivalence shows that the new order is no less beautiful to the ear than the old, it brings out the extreme character of the change: Lysistrata's design for the time being requires an upheaval, not only within the household, but in the city as well; it is not sufficient that the men be deprived of sexual enjoyment; they must also abdicate politically. The emphasis is now entirely on the political change proper. While in addressing the women Lysistrata appealed to the needs of the women, in addressing the men she must appeal to the needs of the city as a whole. The chorus of women shows a good understanding of the situation by claiming for the women all virtues that could be regarded as titles to rule; female modesty or continence is not among them. They seem to be in danger of forgetting the goal that their temporary seizure of power is meant to achieve and, above all, the means on which they must chiefly rely: the sexual desire that animates them first and then affects the men (553). Lysistrata reminds them of these things in a manner intelligible to them but not to the dignitary. She seems to feel that her great design will be spoiled if it becomes known too early. Perhaps she apprehends that if the men away on military service become aware of their wives' strike, they will not be eager to come home or, in other words, she believes that the wives' abstention must come entirely as a surprise to the

husbands. The dignitary understands only that the women mean to put an end to the war, but he has no inkling of how they mean to do it. He does not deny that the women might put a stop to the ridiculous conduct of armed men buying figs or olives from old women in the market, but he denies that they could put a stop to the many great disorders from which the city suffers. Lysistrata, anticipating the Eleatic stranger in Plato's *Statesman*, tells him that the women's work in handling wool is a perfect model for bringing order into the disordered affairs of the city, for restoring peace and the political greatness of Athens; it teaches among other things the wisdom of a liberal policy toward the metics. The dignitary does not pause to consider Lysistrata's comparison of the political art with the arts of wool carding and weaving; he dismisses the women's claim on the simple ground that they understand nothing of the war or, as he puts it, that they do not have the smallest share in the war. This immense stupidity leads immediately to his downfall. As Lysistrata tells him, women suffer more from war than men: The mothers must send their sons into battle; the young wives can not enjoy the best time of their lives since they must sleep alone; the young girls can not marry and become old maids. The dignitary can not contest what Lysistrata said about the mothers and the young wives; he merely asserts that the men too get old during the war. Yet, as Lysistrata replies, the women's season is shorter than that of the men; an oldish man coming home from the war can still marry a young girl, while young men will not marry old girls. The dignitary tries to maintain the equality of suffering of the two sexes against this cogent reasoning by trying to point out that the old maids might marry still older men; but he is rudely silenced by Lysistrata, who tells him that he at any rate is no longer fit for marriage, but only for the grave. Accordingly she and the other women treat him as if he were already a corpse and chase him away with utter contempt.

What Lysistrata indicates about those sufferings that women undergo as a consequence of war approaches the limits of what can be properly mentioned in a comedy. She surely does not speak—or is not permitted by the dignitary to speak (590)—of the misery of the mother (or father) who lost her (or his) son or sons in battle. Yet the transcomical character of the theme is not the only reason why the climactic exchange between Lysistrata and the dignitary is so elliptical. Lysistrata distinguishes between three kinds of women; only the second kind have husbands in the war and are therefore the only ones on which the success of her design depends: They are the women in their prime who as a rule have small

children (18-19, 99-100), whereas the women of the first kind already have sons of military age. When *Lysistrata* speaks of the first kind, she alludes to their fallen sons; when she speaks of the central kind, she does not allude to their fallen husbands. She thus indicates the basic flaw of her design or the impossibility on which her design is based. She abstracts from the widows of the fallen soldiers, the war widows. Those widows can not co-operate with *Lysistrata*, for no refusal on their part will bring back or contribute toward bringing back their husbands. Besides, the husbands turned away by their wives will not necessarily be turned away by the widows, who also are women in their prime and who may very well believe that they fulfill a patriotic duty by breaking the wives' strike. *Lysistrata's* design can be imagined as a way out only if one abstracts from the war widows, what one might call the reserve army that every war necessarily produces. The *Lysistrata* is based on the absurd disregard of the fact that war increases the demand of women for men because it decreases the supply of men. The abstraction from the war widows, i.e., of the fallen husbands or, generally stated, of death, is compensated for in a manner befitting comedy by the women's treating the dignitary as a corpse.

The silencing and disgracing of the dignitary is immediately followed by the parabasis. Since *Lysistrata's* goal is peace—peace also between men and women—and the conflict between the men and the women is still in full force, or rather since the plot calls for two antagonistic choruses, the parabasis of the play differs from the parabases of all plays hitherto discussed: There can not be a parabasis proper in which a single chorus addresses the audience; this fact alone would explain why the parabasis of the *Lysistrata* is silent about the poet. Since the plot requires two choruses, the title could not well be taken from the chorus. The parabasis of the *Lysistrata* is altogether a part of the action of the play, as is the parabasis of the *Birds*, which is also silent about the poet. Yet, as we recall, the *Lysistrata* differs from all other plays hitherto discussed by the fact that it lacks a Euripidean prologue and in particular a spokesman for the poet: The poet is more absent from the *Lysistrata* than from the other plays hitherto discussed. The *Lysistrata* and the *Birds* also have in common that each points to two radically different actions. In the *Birds* there is the divergence between the action aiming at the universal rule of the birds as gods or at the dethronement of Zeus, which culminates in Peisithetairos' becoming the successor of Zeus, and the action aiming at men living like birds and with the birds; the parabasis speaks of these two

actions, although or because one of them is closer to the spirit of the poet than the other. In the *Lysistrata* there is at least the difference between the domestic action of the women (the wives' strike) and their political action (the change from rule by men to rule by women); the parabasis is silent about the former. There seems to be no reason to suppose that one of these two actions is closer to the spirit of the poet than the other. When the women compare themselves to the dung beetle (695), they may remind us of that animal's helpfulness in obtaining peace (in the *Peace*); there is no reason why they should remind us of the comic poet's art.

The parabasis shows that the women have been victorious—to the extent that they were victorious—only by deed; the men are entirely unconvinced. The chorus of old men draws the only conclusion that anyone not initiated into the women's secret could draw from the women's conduct. They take it for granted that the women are bent on political change, on the establishment of tyranny, and they suspect strongly that the women are conspiring with the Spartans: How else could one explain their desire for peace with utterly untrustworthy Sparta? But the old men will not bow to tyranny; they will follow the model of the Athenian tyrannicides and hit the women hard. The women reply to this threat with a threat of their own. Addressing the audience, they speak of their credentials; they have completed the *cursus honorum* of Athenian girls, which consisted in serving Artemis and Athena; as mature women they have borne warriors to the city. Although they are women, they are entitled to give the city good advice, especially since no one else does. Yet they do not give the city any advice, good or bad: The men would not listen to their speeches but only to their deeds. Besides, the design animating the *Lysistrata* is very broad; hence there is no advice that they might give to the city that is not put into effect by the women in the course of the play itself. The women do not deny that they intend to set up tyranny. No wonder that the old men, who have experiences of their own and who remember the Amazones, expect the gravest danger from the women's political and military action; they prepare for another fight. So do the women, who now almost allude to their negotiations with the enemy and to their resolve to put an end to the democracy and to its ruling by decrees.

The threatened fight does not occur because a crisis has arisen in the other sphere. The women's attention is diverted from their decrepit male opponents to their vigorous female leader. Lysistrata appears again, this time utterly discouraged. The women desert her; they are overcome by

desire; she is unable to keep them away from their men; they are eager to go home. She speaks of four cases of attempted desertion that she has discovered just in time. We see on the stage five more such cases. It is in this context that Lysistrata swears perhaps for the first time by Aphrodite: The very goddess on whose power she counts for the success of her design threatens her design. Yet she succeeds in making the women accept their hard lot by assuring them that their husbands suffer no less than they do, and above all by citing to them an oracle that promises them everything they may desire if they stay on the akropolis and do not go home. While she did not need an oracle for initiating her action, at least her public action, she needs one for its completion. It is perhaps more important to note that through an act that is likewise not merely human, the women's husbands, who at the beginning were away from home on military service while their wives were at home, are now at home while their wives are away from home, on the akropolis, on military service. Without this change, which is no less marvelous than Amphytheos' journeying to Sparta and back, Lysistrata's design would have been doomed to failure. In the situation as it was at the beginning, the wives' abstinence would have been easy, but for this very reason wholly ineffectual. Only in the situation as it is now can the wives' abstinence be effectual; but it is also much harder now, in particular since it now lacks its primary incentive, which is the desire to bring their husbands home. Still, thanks to Lysistrata's vigorous leadership her design may well succeed, provided the wives are more continent than their husbands. One may say that the husbands' return, which endangers the wives' resolution, may fortify that resolution.

Lysistrata has succeeded in preventing her army from melting away. Hence the politico-military situation seems to be the same as it was at the end of the parabasis: The chorus of the old men and the chorus of the old women oppose each other. Yet the intervening scene has had a subtle effect; the two sexes are no longer bent on fighting each other. The old men praise a young bachelor of antiquity who hated women and therefore lived on mountains, never going home: If men are married and at home, as at least some of the Athenian warriors are now, everything is lost; the old men do not hope to receive help against women from men in their prime. The women praise Timon who hated, not all human beings, or even all men, but all wicked men, whereas he loved women; the chorus of women is less hostile to the opposite sex than the chorus of men: The women know and admit that they have allies among the men. Still, the men too

have become somewhat friendlier to the women than they were before. The present exchange is more obscene than the one that constituted the parabasis. The increase in obscenity is matched by a decrease in political fervor: Not even the men refer any longer to the danger of tyranny. The success of the wives' strike makes unnecessary any change of regime. Hence the old men begin to soften.

The success of the wives' strike depends on their being more continent than the men. The exemplary test takes place in the next scene. Lysistrata calls the women to her; she has seen a man approaching who is visibly in a state of high sexual excitation: Aphrodite has done her work on him. Lysistrata has prevented the wives from going home; now the husbands come to the akropolis. The man in question is Kinesias, the husband of Myrrhine. Lysistrata reminds her of her oath and asks her and the other women to leave. Kinesias enters, followed by a slave who carries a male child of his master and mistress. (We remember Trygaios' two daughters.) We learn immediately why the women are bound to defeat the men: the bodily sign of sexual excitement is much harder to bear or is a much more visible handicap in the case of men than in the case of women; by disregarding everything else the poet proves that continence is harder for men than for women. Lysistrata does everything she can do within the limits of propriety to aggravate Kinesias' condition. She tells him how highly his wife thinks of him. For Kinesias this is only an additional reason why Lysistrata should reunite him with his wife; she promises to send Myrrhine to him. There is no suggestion that Kinesias ever was away from home. Myrrhine appears on high but refuses to descend to Kinesias, even when on his command her child calls her; she only changes her mind when she learns that during the six days she has been with Lysistrata, the child was neither bathed nor given suck. She at least pretends to regard having children as a mere burden and to be utterly indifferent to what happens to her household. While she kisses the child, she forbids her husband to touch her. He now learns for the first time the cause of his wife's strange conduct; Myrrhine tells him that her conduct will not change until the men put an end to the war. He does not show the slightest surprise; in the condition in which he finds himself, he is only concerned with doing whatever his wife demands so that he can enjoy her. He therefore promises that among any other things the women might demand the men will also end the war; she should only lie down with him. Myrrhine finds one excuse after another for refusing, and then, when she can no longer avoid promising to accede, for delaying the performance of the promise; after

having kept him in suspense for an eternity, she finally runs away. Earlier in the scene she had extorted from him another promise regarding the peace; but toward its end he promises no more than that he will deliberate about the peace: The wives' refusal may still backfire; even Kinesias, who prefers his wife to all other women, begins to ask himself whether he should not turn toward a second-best solution. The success of the wives' strike is then not yet assured. This makes one wonder again whether the women could not succeed in ending the war by effecting a change of regime in Athens. The chorus of old men is outraged by Myrrhine's trifling with Kinesias and full of compassion for him. While their hatred of women had weakened as a consequence of the women's longing for their husbands, it has regained something of its former strength owing to Myrrhine's intransigence. And, what is at least as important, the old men do not appear at all to have grasped Lysistrata's grand design.

All uncertainties are removed by the arrival of a herald from Sparta. He has been sent by the Spartan authorities to learn from the Athenian authorities whether they are prepared to treat about peace. While in Athens the conflict between the peace party (the women) and the war party (the men) has not yet been settled in favor of the former, the strike of the Spartan wives led by Lampito has been entirely successful. As Lampito had indicated at the beginning (168–71), the power of the Spartan wives over their husbands was much greater than the power of the Athenian women over the Athenian *demos*;⁷⁰ in Sparta the victory of the peace party did not require even the semblance of a threat of a change of regime. Or, if you wish, Sparta was already a gynaeocracy. It is the change of mind of the Spartans and nothing else that tips the scale in favor of peace. Things had not been going too well for Athens and hence rather well for Sparta; in that situation it would have been most impolitic for the Athenians to take the initiative for peace. The only hope for peace consisted in the Spartans taking that initiative. Lysistrata's master stroke consisted in hitting on the only thing that could induce the Spartans not only to become willing to make peace but even to sue for it. The Athenian men understand Lysistrata's design only at the moment that design has succeeded, and even then only partly; the arrival of the Spartan herald makes them realize for the first time that the conspiracy under foot is not directed toward the establishment of tyranny (1008). The situation is now so clear and simple that the Athenian magistrate who talks to the Spartan herald can tell him without having been authorized by the Council that the Spartans should at once send ambassadors with full powers to Athens

in order to discuss peace, while he will tell the Athenian Council to elect ambassadors for the same purpose: In the given situation there is not the slightest doubt that Athens will make peace, since the Spartans have taken the initiative.

After the herald has left for Sparta, i.e., after the Athenian women have won their fight for peace without having been compelled to change the regime, the time has come for the reconciliation between the two choruses. The defeated old men still give vent to feelings as misogynic as those animating Euripides' Hippolytos. Yet a few deft moves of the old women suffice to break down what is left of the old men's dislike. Moved to tears, they grant grumpily that the little services the women render them are not entirely unwelcome. Addressing the audience for the first time jointly, the two choruses communicate a spirit of good feeling and benevolence to the city as a whole by not saying, as they state explicitly, a single bad thing about anyone and by quasi-promising money and a hearty dinner to everyone. Here would have been the place for a second parabasis if the purport of the play had permitted a second parabasis.

The ambassadors from Sparta arrive, most anxious for peace at any price because their wives' strike is still in force. The Athenians are as paralyzed by the women's strike as the Spartans. It is therefore indispensable for the men from both camps to have recourse to Lysistrata for the making of peace. Lysistrata appears uncalled. She is told that since the first of the Greeks have made her their arbiter—she is of course not a ruler, not even of the Athenians—she must combine now seemingly incompatible qualities, in a word, she must be both good and bad.⁷¹ She asks Diallagē (Reconciliation), a companion of Aphrodite and the Graces, a silent being although obviously not a statue, to bring to her first the Spartans and then the Athenians; by giving orders to Diallagē she makes it quite clear that the peace is of purely human origin. She treats the Spartans with special courtesy. Her credentials are her native wit and her having heard many speeches from her father and men of age (she does not owe any of her wisdom to her husband); she is aware of the inferiority of women. She blames both the Spartans and the Athenians for destroying each other despite their common cults and the presence of their common enemy, the barbarians. She blames each side for being oblivious of the benefits that the other side has conferred upon it. In accordance with their having made the first step toward peace, the Spartans admit their guilt. Agreement between the two hitherto warring cities is rendered both easy and difficult by the fact that both the Spartans and the Athenians are filled

with intense desire for the feminine charms of the beautiful girl Diallagē or of Lysistrata herself—a desire that in their present condition they can hardly distinguish from their desire for strategically valuable places still occupied by the opposed party. Fortunately the present needs of their bodies are stronger than all political considerations. At Lysistrata's suggestion the women will dine the men from the two cities on the akropolis, where the solemn conclusion of the peace will take place; thereafter everyone will leave, taking his wife with him. There is no suggestion that Lysistrata's husband will be among the men to be dined by the women.

The chorus expresses its satisfaction with the reconciliation by making another quasi-promise of gifts to all; being concerned with peace it again does not speak evil of any citizen, yet given the poverty caused by the war it can not make genuine promises. There follows an obscure scene; threats of violence are uttered against people who prevent the egress of the Spartans from the dinner. Are these people the unreconstructed war party? It appears that a brawl would be welcome to the audience, but no brawl takes place: Aristophanes here tacitly refuses to employ devices of vulgar comedy; in the *Lysistrata* the poet speaks only inaudibly about himself. The peace banquet proves to have been most satisfactory; both the Spartans and the Athenians were at their best; according to an Athenian the Spartans were charming, while the wine-drinking Athenians were most wise banqueteers. The chorus draws the conclusion that henceforth all Athenian ambassadors to Sparta must do their work in a state of drunkenness, i.e., of benevolence. The work begun by Aphrodite must be completed by Dionysos, in the Athenian manner.⁷² A Spartan proposes that they dance and sing in order to gratify both the Athenians and the Spartans; his proposal is of course gladly received. He praises the exploit of the Athenians at Artemision and the exploit of the Spartans at Thermopylai. He is silent on their joint exploit at Plataiai; and he calls on the divine virgin, the huntress Artemis, to help in keeping the peace between Athens and Sparta for a long time: There is no prospect of everlasting peace between the two cities. Thereafter Lysistrata unites the Spartan wives, whom she has kept as hostages, with their husbands; the reunion of the husbands and the wives—of the members of the war party and those of the peace party—naturally follows from the reunion of Sparta and Athens. She counsels the husbands to stay with their wives and the wives to stay with their husbands; her last words in the play are "Let us beware of making the same mistakes again." She means, of course, the mistakes of the Spartans and the Athenians, but the context suggests also the

errings of husbands and wives. The chorus of Athenians calls on Artemis, Apollon, Dionysos, Zeus, and Hera, and then on the divinities who are witnesses to that sweet rest which is the work of Aphrodite; it is silent about Athena as well as Athens. At the request of an Athenian, a Spartan sings a novel song; in that song, which concludes the play, the Spartan glorifies Apollon, Athena, and the Dioskuroi and then celebrates Sparta, especially her maidens, whose choruses are led by the chaste Helen: The Spartan maidens shall glorify Athena, the utterly warlike. The play celebrating peace ends with a praise of the warrior goddess (cf. *Clouds* 967). As we have learned from the *Peace*, there is no peace that is not followed sooner or later by war, be it only a war against barbarians, or that can be preserved without the threat of war. The *Lysistrata* does not end with a joint song of the Spartans and the Athenians. As is indicated by the final Athenian and Spartan songs, the reconciliation between the two cities requires that the differences between them be not obliterated: The peace was initiated by the Athenian Lysistrata, who trusted in the power of Aphrodite in Sparta, and Lysistrata's conceit originated in Aristophanes, who had been brought up by Dionysos. Only the Spartans praise Athena in the final songs.

At first glance the *Lysistrata* differs from the two other peace plays by the fact that in the *Acharnians* and the *Peace* peace is brought about by the action, either helped or hindered by the gods, of the comic poet, whereas in the *Lysistrata* peace is brought about by the action, neither helped nor hindered by the gods, of the women: Diallagē acts under Lysistrata's orders after the decisive action has already been completed. Yet, quite apart from Diallagē, the gods are not simply absent from the *Lysistrata*: The peace is the work of Aphrodite (1289-90). As for the poet's absence, we must remember that Dikaiopolis gave a share in his private peace only to a lovesick woman from compassion with her; such compassion animates the *Lysistrata*, in which the women favor peace while the men—with the tacit exception of the poet—favor war: The women take the place of the poet. The poet as poet is less present in the *Lysistrata* than in any of the other plays hitherto discussed: No character of the play represents the poet or swears by Dionysos or acts as spokesman for the poet, and there occurs no questioning of the fundamental requirements of the city (Lysistrata does not even question the essential inferiority of women). If war is the business of men, it seems to follow that peace is the business of women and that the peace-loving poet must take the side of the women. This difference of the sexes is reflected in the the-

ology of the *Peace*, in the opposition of Eirene (and her female companions) and Polemos (and his male companion). Yet precisely in the *Peace* Polemos' being alive was clearer than Eirene's being alive. A similar obscurity may be observed in the *Lysistrata*. Peace seems to be the work of Aphrodite, but Aphrodite is not simply a goddess of peace. Since the poet does not act within the *Lysistrata*, the women must act; they must act like men (war must become the business of women). They must fight like Amazones, and at the same time they must refuse themselves to their husbands and cease to take care of their children: They must destroy life rather than perpetuate it. They bring about peace, not by doing "the golden deeds" of Aphrodite, but by imitating the virgin goddesses Artemis and Athena; these two goddesses are more powerfully present (also through oaths and invocations) in the *Lysistrata* than in any other play. Yet the huntress Artemis and the utterly warlike Athena are even less goddesses of peace than Aphrodite. The ending of the play puts the emphasis altogether on Athena, the warlike goddess who not only does not give birth but was herself not born, not generated by a father and a mother, the embodied denial of life. If we can trust Peisthetairos, she is the only legitimate heir of Zeus (*Birds* 1652-54), who would be the most lawful successor of Zeus but for Peisthetairos' becoming the successor of Zeus.

Peace is brought about not by Aphrodite but by Lysistrata, by the effect of the wives' strike, instigated by Lysistrata, on the husbands. The strike could not be effective if the husbands were not at home, but the wives adopt Lysistrata's design on the ground that the husbands are not at home. Apart from this, the strike could not be effective if the wives did not have greater self-control than the husbands. This assumption is supported by what is expected of women as well as by the existence of such female gods as Artemis and Athena. Finally and above all, the strike could be effective only if there were not the reserve army of war widows, i.e., if contrary to nature the husbands in the armed forces were not killable or, generally stated, if there were no possibility of sexual gratification except through intercourse between lawfully wedded husbands and wives, or if the pleasure of sexual gratification were possible only in and through marriage: Husbands (wives) must have no opportunity for that gratification when away from their wives (when their husbands are in the field).⁷³ Lysistrata's design presupposes that unnatural coincidence of *physis* and *nomos* according to which war would be against nature because it condemns men and women to sexual starvation or prevents the

generation of offspring whereas, to say nothing of other things, a small number of men can fertilize a large number of women: There is no fundamental disharmony between war and nature or between Ares and Aphrodite. Lysistrata tries to overcome this fundamental harmony by assimilating herself and the other wives to the virgin goddesses; those goddesses are accordingly supposed to bring about the coincidence of *physis* and *nomos*. The *Lysistrata* may therefore be said to present the victory of *nomos* and in this respect to resemble the *Clouds* as distinguished from the other plays hitherto discussed, all of which celebrate the defeat of *nomos*; both plays celebrate the victory of beings hated by Euripides (or by Socrates). In both plays the victorious cause owes its victory not to speech but to deed. In accordance with all this the *Lysistrata* answers the question of the godness of the gods poetically by pointing to Athena.

Peace is brought about by the effect of the wives' strike on the Spartan husbands. In Athens the sex strike is not sufficient, given the small power of the Athenian women over the Athenian *demos*: The politically active *demos* is the citizens at home, i.e., the old men, who can not be reduced to submission by sexual starvation; the old men are to be fought in the first place by the old women, who seize the treasure. Yet this action is only preparatory to the women's seizing political power. Lysistrata's design requires the change of regime in addition to the sex strike. One might say that the sex strike is the action of the young women (wives) against the young men (husbands), while the political action is primarily the action of the old women against the old men; there is no suggestion that the political action is the action of wives against their husbands. Prior to the arrival of the herald from Sparta, it was, to say the least, uncertain whether the Athenian women would succeed in inducing the Athenian men to make peace, i.e., whether the Athenians would make peace without a previous change of regime. Both the wives' strike and the women's coming to power are impossible. Yet in the *Lysistrata* the women are the peace party and the men are the war party. Let us assume that the women stand for the men favoring peace, and the men stand for the men favoring war. In that case the play would show that the only possible way to obtain peace in the circumstances is by a change of regime in Athens, the coming to power of the kind of men who would need the support of Sparta to control the *demos* and for this reason will already have made contacts with Sparta, just as Lysistrata does. Such a policy would require the utmost secrecy and therefore an ostensible policy concealing the preparation for

the change of regime. The action of the *Lysistrata* reflects this state of things in a laughable manner, inasmuch as the peace party treats the sex strike as a strict secret, while it does not counteract the impression that it aims at political subversion, the setting up of "tyranny." The laughable character of the action of the play is limited entirely to the sex strike. One wonders whether the change of regime—as distinguished from that change of regime which was effected by Peisthetairos—is not the poet's serious proposal. In that case the *Lysistrata* would come closer to suggesting a serious political proposal than any other play. For, to speak only of the most political play, in the *Knights* the poet may be said to propose seriously the ouster of Kleon, but he does not show seriously how this ouster could be achieved. Yet is a serious proposal compatible with the total comedy? Would Athens informed by a regime dependent on Spartan support not be an Athens deprived of its virility? Through the actions of women Aristophanes speaks of the actions of higher or more dangerous beings. He explicitly claims that he does not treat comically mere "human beings" and in particular women.⁷⁴ Whatever might be true of the two other women's plays, the *Lysistrata* surely does not contradict that claim.

68. 188–90; cf. Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 43–45.

69. Cf. Plutarch *Nicias* 13.7.

70. Cf. Aristotle *Politics* 1269^b12–1270^a8.

71. 1109. For the interpretation cf. Xenophon *Memorabilia* II 2.2 and III 1.6 as well as *Cyropaedia* I 6.27.

72. Plato *Laws* 637^{a–b}.

73. 954–58, 1091–92; *Thesmoph.* 491–96.

74. *Wasps* 1029–30, *Peace* 751.